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SENATORS COLEMAN-BURNS-BAUCUS-PRYOR HOST NATIONAL TOWN HALL TO CRACK DOWN ON METH

Bipartisan Forum to address dangers and seek solution to halt killer drug pandemic

January 20th, 2006 - Washington, D.C. - To address the increasing dangers Methamphetamines exact on our nation's communities and families, Senators Norm Coleman (R-MN), Conrad Burns (R-MT), Max Baucus (D-MT), and Mark Pryor (D-AR) today announced that they will host a National Town Hall on Methamphetamine Awareness and Prevention Monday, January 23, 2006. U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Drug Czar John Walters of the Office of National Drug Control Policy will make opening remarks and during the three panel sessions during the town hall, the senators will be joined by state and national panelists, including drug enforcement officials, rehabilitative services personnel, and former users of meth who have experienced the devastating and tragic effects of the synthetically-made drug. The event has been assembled as a national forum in which to understand the use and widespread impact of the drug, as well as seek ways to inform the public, deter use, and examine possible legislative initiatives to further combat meth.

"The effects of meth on families and communities across Minnesota and the nation are devastating," said Coleman. "I'm gravely concerned about this pandemic and its far-reaching impact. Meth is cheap, potent, and available everywhere, and has affected each of our 87 counties in Minnesota. Sadly, we have seen more than a 180 percent increase in drug methamphetamine task force arrests between 1999 and 2003. This is a serious issue that needs to be addressed nationally. I'm pleased that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me and others back home to work toward a remedy and fight this deadly drug."

"We need to provide law enforcement with the resources they need to stop the spread of meth across Big Sky country, but it doesn't end there—treatment and prevention are key to curbing meth use in Montana," said Burns. "I am especially grateful to Tom Siebel for his work with the Montana Meth Project, which at the end of 2005, was the largest advertiser in the state. Thanks are also due to Roger Curtiss, a treatment counselor and advocate for meth recovery, who has in the past served as the President of the National Association of Addiction Professionals, and whose experience on the ground in Montana dealing with meth is truly an asset to us."

"Meth is an awful drug that is wreaking havoc in Montana and across the country and I'm committed to doing whatever it takes to wipe out meth," Baucus said. "I've been fighting to knock out meth for many years – I helped to get Montana into Rocky Mountain HIDTA so we could get more dollars for our law enforcement officials to help combat meth. And I continually meet with students and law enforcement officials about the dangers of meth. By working together we can make a difference in the fight against meth."

"Meth continues to creep its way into our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces -- tearing apart families and stretching thin local law enforcement and health care providers," Pryor said. "I believe a stronger commitment from all levels of government is necessary to reverse this trend, and I am hopeful this bipartisan forum will serve as a catalyst to advance the most effective solutions to combat meth and the problems this drug creates in our communities."

Among the panelists will be Ashley Smith, former hostage of Brian Nichols who escaped during the Atlanta Court shooting in March, 2005, and led authorities to his whereabouts. During her ordeal, one way Smith appeased Nichols and stayed alive was by giving him crystal methamphetamine. In her memoirs released in September, Smith revealed her addiction to meth and asserts that her hostage ordeal awakened her to the fact that she was an addict. She maintains she has not used drugs since the ordeal.

Methamphetamine is considered one of the most deadly, fiercely addictive and rapidly spreading drug in the United States. During the past decade, while law enforcement officers continue to bust record numbers of clandestine labs, meth use in communities has increased by as much as 300 percent, becoming the leading drug-related local law enforcement problem in the country. Seventy percent of law enforcement agencies say that robberies and burglaries have increased because of meth use, while 62 percent increases in domestic violence. The number of criminal cases with meth charges increased from approximately 500 in 1999 to almost 4000 in 2004, an 800 percent increase.

Senator Coleman is coauthor of the Combat Meth Act of 2005 to limit access to cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine, the primary ingredient used to make methamphetamine. The Senate approved the bill by unanimous consent adding it to the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill. Final passage of the Combat Met Act is expected in early 2006.

This past September, Coleman unveiled the Coleman Meth Task Force comprised of law enforcement officials, hospital administrators, school nurses and recover professionals to address needed legislation and initiatives to help combat meth use.

As part of the goal of the National Town Hall on Meth, the bipartisan group will also seek to introduce new legislative initiatives in 2006 to further address and fight the growing trend of meth use across the nation and build on previous legislation and funding already introduced.

EVENT SET-UP

The Town Hall will be broadcast live from the Senate Dirksen building, room 419 from 1:00-4:00 p.m. EST, and will also be available in web cast form at www.coleman.senate.gov.

Each state's forum will be connected via satellite and have access to internet in order for audience members to electronically submit questions during the Question and Answer period during each panel.

Questions can be emailed in advance of the town hall, as well as throughout the live broadcast. Questions can be emailed to methtownhall@coleman.senate.gov.

Panel One

Nora Volkow, M.D., Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse
Carol Falkowski, Hazelden, Director of Research Communications (Minnesota)
Roger Curtiss, past president of NAADAC (Montana)
Ashley Smith, Atlanta Court Hostage and Author

Panel Two

Jeff Van Vonderen, A&E Television, "Intervention"
James F. Hanko, President & CEO, North Country Health Services (Minnesota)
James C. Backstrom, Dakota County Attorney (Minnesota)
Bill Hansell, President of National Association of Counties, (Oregon)
Loni Perrin (Wisconsin)

Panel Three

Tony Loya, Southwest Border HIDTA
Rich Scherber, MN Teen Challenge, Executive Director (Minnesota)
John McVay, State Substance Abuse Director, Nebraska
Tom Siebel, Montana Meth Project
Kelly Sayers
Joshua, 16 years old (Minnesota)

Minnesota Meth Town Hall Locations:

St. Thomas University
3M Auditorium
Owens Science Hall
2115 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, MN

Itasca Community College
Davies Hall Theatre
1851 East Highway 169
Grand Rapids, MN

Winona State University
104/105 Kryzsko Commons
Corner of Huff and Howard
Winona, MN

Ridgewater College
Large Community Outreach Room

2101 15th Avenue NW
Willmar, MN

Rochester Community and Technical College
Coffman Center Room 206/208
851 30th Avenue SE
Rochester, MN

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Memorial Library
Room 3010
Ellis & Maywood Ave.
Mankato, MN

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